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The remarkable TRIAL *of the* Rev. WILLIAM SNEYD, *for* SEDUCING, DEBAUCHING, *and* CARRYING OFF, *the wife of* HENRY CECIL, Esq. *before* LORD KENYON, *in the* COURT *of* KING's BENCH, WESTMINSTER-HALL, *June 26th*, 1790.

THE pleadings being opened, Mr. Bower thus addreſſed the jury.

"I am Counſel in this caſe for the plaintiff. Mr. Cecil, who brings the preſent action for an injury, which has been of late too much the ſubject of complaint; an injury of the moſt ſerious nature, which one man can poſſibly commit againſt another.

"After the plaintiff married his lady, he lived with her for many years, in the greateſt domeſtic happineſs and tranquillity, until the incident which I am about to relate happened, which interrupted and deſtroyed all the happineſs they enjoyed, in the honourable relation of huſband and wife.

"The plaintiff, Mr. Cecil, is a gentleman of high rank and family, and preſumptive heir to the Earl of Exeter, alſo a member of Parliament. Thirteen or fourteen years ago, he married Miſs Vernon, his preſent wife, then a young lady, the only daughter and heireſs of Mr. Vernon,

in

in Worceſterſhire, a gentleman alſo of very large fortune.

" From the year of their marriage, 17 6, until the time when the injury was done by Mr. Sneyd, I ſhall prove to you that no two perſons could live in a ſtate of greater affection or greater harmony than Mr. and Mrs. Cecil; he had not the ſmalleſt ſuſpicion of her infidelity, and loved her with the moſt ardent and tender affection.

" In the year 1780, the Living of Hambury, which was in the gift of Mr. Cecil, having become vacant, he preſented a friend of his to that living; and as it was not convenient for him to reſide on the ſpot, he introduced Mr. Sneyd as his curate, who, in his abſence, was to perform the duties of his office. Although Mr. Sneyd came to this pariſh in the character of a curate, he was the ſon of a reſpectable gentleman, the youngeſt ſon of a family in Staffordſhire. Under this deſcription he was likely to be treated with affection and politeneſs.

" Mr. Cecil had a reſpect for the perſon and family of this young man; he accordingly introduced him into his family, and received frequent viſits from him: the defendant often dined with the plaintiff, and being in a poor ſtate of health, when

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when the weather was bad, he was conſtantly accommodated with a bed in the plaintiff's houſe, and was treated in every reſpect as a gentleman, and as a proper gueſt to viſit in his houſe.

" From the year 1780, when the defendant firſt came to Hanbury, until the year 1789, when he left it, Mr. Cecil had no reaſon to repent his acquaintance with Mr. Sneyd; but it ſhould ſeem that ſome intimacy had ſubſiſted for ſome time prior to 1789, between Mr. Sneyd and Mrs. Cecil, from the facts which I am about to ſtate.

" About the middle of June laſt, Mrs. Cecil prevailed upon her huſband to go on a party of pleaſure to Birmingham, which is about 18 or 20 miles diſtant from Mr. Cecil's houſe; it was intimated to Mr. Cecil by his Lady, that the diſtance was too great to go with their own horſes, and therefore it would be better to take poſt horſes---Mr. Cecil complied with the requeſt.---He, Mrs. Cecil, and Mr. Edward Sneyd, ſet out for Birmingham. Mr. Cecil returned back to Hanbury alone, in the evening, and Mrs. Cecil was to have followed him, in company with Mr. Edward Sneyd.

" When Mrs. Cecil had remained out much longer than her huſband expected, he

he began to be anxious about her, but had no idea what was going forward; and as ſhe did not return, he made what enquiries he could, but could not find her out; and this enquiry was made more difficult, by Mrs. Cecil and Mr. Sneyd aſſuming fictitious names. The moment that Mr. Cecil had diſcovered that his wife had eloped, he left his houſe, and has never ſince returned to his friends. From the diſagreeable ſituation into which he has been thrown by the groſs miſconduct of his wife, he has not been able to pay viſits to his friends, but now reſides ſomewhere beyond the ſeas.

" I cannot ſay what became of Mrs. Cecil and Mr. Sneyd, for a day or two after they left Birmingham, where Mr. Sneyd then reſided in a very poor ſtate of health. I ſhall paſs over every thing until they came to Exeter. When they arrived there, they both took apartments at Thompſon's Hotel, where they ſlept three or four nights, as huſband and wife, under the name ot Mr. and Mrs. Benſon. They then came to an obſcure village in Devonſhire, where they lived three or four months, in lodgings; they then quitted that place, and came to London, where they now reſide; in ſeparate lodgings, indeed---but viſit each other every day.

" This

" This is the whole account of the buſineſs, as far as is neceſſary to lay before you. You know and will feel, the nature of this ſort of injury. You ſee the ſituation of the parties, and the rank of Mr. Cecil, and the neceſſity of his taking care that no ſpurious iſſue be impoſed on his family. You will attend to the evidence which I ſhall now lay before you, and give ſuch a compenſation in damages as ſubſtantial juſtice requires."

William Wills, proved the marriage of Mr. Henry Cecil and Miſs Vernon, which took place on the 23d of May, 1776, at St. George's, Hanover-Square.

William Janſey, the plaintiff's butler, depoſed, that he knew the parties, and that he came to live with Mr. Cecil in the year 1785, and lived with him near four years and a half, that his maſter and miſtreſs had lived in the greateſt harmony and confidence, prior to the time ſhe was carried off. He knew Mr. Sneyd, the defendant, who was the curate of Hanbury, that he frequently viſited his maſter's family, who always behaved very politely to him, and treated him as a gentleman; he was ſometimes there at ſupper, and in bad weather he ſlept there frequently; he ſaid Mr. Sneyd left Hanbury about the end of May 1789, and remembered Mr. and Mrs. Cecil going to Birmingham,

mingham, about 18 or 20 miles from their houſe, in June, the ſame year; that his maſter returned the ſame night, but Mrs. Cecil did not.

This witneſs on croſs-examination ſaid, they were frequently walking out together, and often went on fiſhing parties, and that the huſband knew of it. He had heard from his fellow ſervant that the firſt time his maſter heard of any improper attachment between his miſtreſs and Mr. Sneyd, was, when he came to Mr. Sneyd's ſick-bed, and then he told him of it with tears in his eyes; that Mrs. Cecil was preſent when Mr. Sneyd went into his father's carriage at Hanbury-hall, in order to go to Birmingham; that it was a thing notorious in the family, that Mrs. Cecil had been guilty of adultery before Mr. Sneyd left Hanbury; it was diſcovered to Mr. Cecil, but he did not inform her of it, nor did he know that he was ever ſo informed till Mr. Sneyd confeſſed it.

Ann Vinican, chambermaid to Mr. Thompſon, who keeps the hotel at the Church-yard at Exeter, depoſed, that two perſons came to their houſe about the middle of June laſt year, who called themſelves Mr. and Mrs. Benſon, but whom ſhe knew ſince to be Mr. Sneyd and Mrs. Cecil. Mr. Sneyd came in a

pepper

pepper and ſalt coloured coat; that they remained at her maſter's houſe three or four days, and during that time they ſlept in the ſame bed---She left them in the room together, with the candle burning---they deſired her to leave it, and ſaid they would put it out. When ſhe made the bed in the morning, it had the appearance of two perſons having ſlept in it; and that there was no other bed in the houſe made for Mr. Sneyd.

Mr. Erſkine, on behalf of the defendant, now addreſſed the Court in words to the following tendency. "I moſt heartily concur in the obſervations which have been made by my learned friend on the ſubject of adultery. Either as it concerns religion, or morals, or wiſe policy, it is the buſineſs and duty of juries to check it; and I do aſſure you, my Lord, I do not mean any flattery; but I ſay, that there is no man who has a higher reſpect and veneration than I have for the manner in which your Lordſhip has always conſidered theſe cauſes when they have come into court before you; and I think it unqueſtionably my duty here, while I am defending an unhappy man, not to ſtrike at the happineſs of ſociety, by advancing any thing which can leſſen the ſanction of nuptial obligation, in which the happineſs

of mankind is ſo much involved. Indeed this cauſe is an awful monument, that Virtue is its own reward, and that Vices and Errors bring their own puniſhment along with them. It is an awful monument, that the rules of religion and morality, and the various reſtraints they impoſe on our behaviour, inſtead of being impoſitions and reſtraints of harſh and powerful taſk-maſters, operate as acts of parental benevolence and affection, and that every thing which we are commanded to do, tends ultimately to our good.

" This unhappy gentleman has felt it. He was a very young man, and fell into the ſnare of this woman, from whom the plaintiff will be relieved by your verdict. This cauſe is only the fore-runner to that divorce which he will be entitled to receive by the proceedings of Parliament: for I do not mean to charge Mr. Cecil, either directly or indirectly, with having connived at this criminal intercourſe which took place between this unhappy gentleman and the plaintiff's wife, or to charge him with any immoral or indecent conduct whatever; this is to be charged to that place where moſt undoubtedly it belongs. This injured huſband is entitled by your verdict, to be releaſed from thoſe obligations which muſt be very diſtreſſing to him.

" Gentlemen,

"Gentlemen, you have no evidence here of that which is the great ſting in theſe caſes. You have no evidence before you of the ſeduction. It appeared in evidence, indeed, that this young curate walked out in different parts with a woman who might be conſidered as a matron. She was poſſeſſed of no perſonal beauty or attractions; but who, from the rank and dignity which ſhe held in the country, as wife of Mr. Cecil, had an opportunity of drawing into her ſnare an unfortunate young man, who poſſeſſed an handſome perſon, which happened to attract her attention.

"Gentlemen, when the defendant recollected the ſituation to which he was reduced, it had an effect on his mind. He fell into a delirium; and it is a fact abſolutely notorious, that no perſon in the family dreamed of any thing like a criminal intercourſe between theſe parties, until it was confeſſed by this unhappy young man in the hour of ſickneſs, who was deſirous of making ſome ſort of atonement to the perſon whom he had injured, and to obtain his forgiveneſs. He was not the aggreſſor—but was drawn in by the allurements of this lady.

"Gentlemen, can you conceive, that for a month before the adultery of this woman

woman was notorious in a family where there were ſo many ſervants, and that the huſband ſhould be the only man who was ignorant of it? Although one ſervant might conceal it for fear, and another from want of fidelity to his maſter; yet it is contrary to every rule of evidence and experience, to ſuppoſe that in a family, conſiſting of ſo many domeſtics, no perſon ſhould be inſpired with ſo much honour, with ſo much allegiance and fidelity to the injured maſter, as to inform him of his wife's baſeneſs. Why did none of them approach the huſband? Becauſe they knew he was already acquainted with it.

"I do not tax Mr. Cecil with being that unconcerned man which he was deſcribed to be, by one of his domeſtics; it is not true that he appeared always with the ſame face. He was diſpoſed at one time to do an act which would have tied him to this woman for ever. She fell down on her knees, and implored her huſband to allow her once more to go and ſee this defendant, to take her final leave of him, and to give up his embraces for ever; and that ſhe would then return to her duty. Our firſt parent turned towards Eve, and the plaintiff, following his example, was willing to forgive his weaker half.

half. This lady ſet out to find this miſerable creature, the defendant—a perſon lying in his bed.—The moment ſhe found him, ſhe put a white coat upon him, clapt a falſe tail to his hair, and carried him off without delay, to Thompſon's Hotel at Exeter!

"Gentlemen, my learned friend has conducted this cauſe very honourably: I am ſure he will not contradict me, in what I am about to ſay; becauſe he knows it as well as I do, and therefore will not oblige me to call witneſſes to prove it. We both know that the defendant is one of many children; that his father has very little property, and is unable to pay large damages. The defendant himſelf is a curate, without any preferment whatever; and if you were to give a verdict for damages any thing like that which a man of fortune would be obliged to pay, he would be utterly undone and ruined; and now he is left an awful monument—deprived of his reaſon, loſt in his health, and miſerable in the extreme.

"I hope, Gentlemen, you will remember one thing—that in this caſe there is no evidence of ſeduction; and the preſent defendant has no reſemblance to that triumphant adulterer that was tried by a

Jury

Jury ſome time ago in this place, and who met with the exemplary puniſhment which was due to his crime. [Here the learned Counſel alluded to the caſe of F. W. Sykes, Eſq.] The *preſent* defendant felt for the honour of his friend, as well as for his own ſituation.

"Gentlemen, I ſhall trouble you with no more obſervations on this ſubject.—This unfortunate defendant is entirely at your mercy—and I am ſure you will do that which is right between both parties."

Lord Kenyon, in his addreſs to the Jury, ſtated who the parties were. As the defendant was in an humble ſituation, he recommended not to put him in a ſituation that would make him priſoner for life.

The Jury conſidered of their verdict for a few minutes, and then found for the Plaintiff, Damages ONE THOUSAND POUNDS.

Though we muſt ſtill maintain our opinion, that adultery is inexcuſable in clerical characters, yet the confeſſion and repentance of the defendant in this caſe diſarm all ſevere animadverſions.

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